

I. INTRODUCTION

This 2003 **P**arks, **O**pen **S**pace, and **T**rails (P.O.S.T.) Master Plan identifies new capital projects and improvements to existing facilities for the Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation Department (BCPR) through 2010. It is an overall framework for future growth of and enhancements to facilities managed by the BCPR Department on behalf of elected County Commissioners and their constituents. The P.O.S.T. is a sequel to the first Bernalillo County Parks & Recreation Master Plan adopted by the County Commission in 1995.

This introduction presents a brief profile of Bernalillo County government, the natural setting and environment of Bernalillo County, the history of the BCPR Department, project accomplishments since 1995, and purposes for this update. Subsequent P.O.S.T. Master Plan chapters are summarized at the end of the introduction.

A. Bernalillo County Profile

Bernalillo County covers 1,166 square miles in central New Mexico and is the most populated of the state's thirty-three counties. Bernalillo County includes the unincorporated portions of the South Valley, North Valley, Northeast Heights, West Mesa, and East Mountains that have 17%, or approximately 95,000, of the County's 556,678 population in the year 2000. Bernalillo County has approximately one-third of New Mexico's year 2000 population of 1,819,046.

The incorporated municipalities of Albuquerque, the Village of Los Ranchos, the Village of Tijeras, and a small portion of the Village of Corrales are within Bernalillo County. Isleta, Sandia, and Ta'jahlillee (formerly Laguna Pueblo) are the three pueblo governments with portions of their reservation boundaries in Bernalillo County. The study area for this P.O.S.T. Master Plan focuses on the unincorporated areas of the valley, mesa, and mountains. It does not address recreational needs in





Official County Logo: The eight sheep represent the original eight land grants within the boundaries of Bernalillo County.

the incorporated communities, Kirtland Air Force Base, or the three pueblos.

The 1912 New Mexico Constitution vested the law-making power of the state in the state legislature. Bernalillo County derives its authority from the State Constitution and is considered a Type A county because its population is over 100,000. Counties are subject to the will of the legislature, modified only by the state constitution, the courts, and the legislative process. Bernalillo County has a Commission/Manager form of government that delegates most of the day-to-day administrative matters to the County Manager. The County Manager oversees four divisions, one of which is the Community Services Division that includes the Parks and Recreation Department, the Zoning, Building, Planning and Environmental Health Department, the Housing Department and Economic Development/CIP Special Projects.

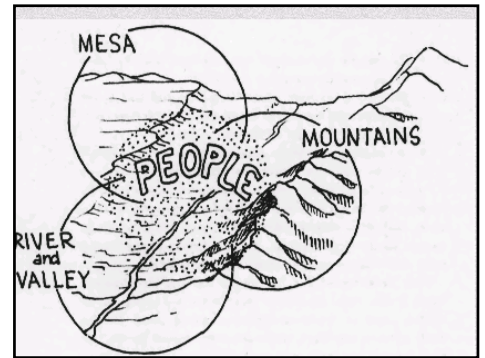
The 2003-2004 operating budget for the entire Bernalillo County Government is approximately \$122 million. The BCPR Department operating budget is \$7.4 million, or 6% of the total County budget. Approximately 1,500 persons are employed either full- or part-time by Bernalillo County in 25 departments. Bernalillo County is represented by five commissioners and five elected officials. County Commissioners are elected by districts while the Assessor, Clerk, Probate Judge, Sheriff and Treasurer are elected Countywide.

B. Natural Environment & Climate

"Albuquerque's natural environment is notable for its three, diversified geographic features: the Sandia and Manzano Mountains forming a dramatic backdrop east of the city; the Rio Grande and its bosque and the valley; and the West Mesa and the volcanoes rising above it. Four seasons, four life zones, and three distinctive geologic regions combine to give the city a unique and vigorous quality. The one unvarying aspect of the Albuquerque scene is the sunny climate, and few would complain about that type of

uniformity." *Albuquerque's Environmental Story: Toward a Sustainable Community* © Hy and Joan Rosner (1996).

The diagram to the right illustrates the different physiographic features of Bernalillo County and where human settlements have occurred. Bernalillo County's beautiful natural settings of mesas, river valley, and mountains provide ample opportunities for outdoor recreation throughout the year.



Physiographic Features of Bernalillo County. Reprinted Courtesy of Albuquerque's Environmental Story: Toward A Sustainable Community

"The city's latitude and altitude combine to give it a pleasant year-round climate. Albuquerque is just far enough south to be spared many of the storms that often touch northern New Mexico. Its elevation of approximately 5,000 feet spares us the extreme heat of Phoenix and other lower-altitude cities in the same latitude. The altitude also provides four distinct but temperate seasons. The average daily range of temperature is relatively wide, but long periods of extreme temperatures are rare. Albuquerque summers usually bring no more than 15 to 20 days when the temperature reaches 100°F and winter nights seldom drop to 0°F.

The Sandias represent a broken segment of the almost continuous Rocky Mountain chain extending the length of the continent from north to south. They obstruct the atmospheric flow that exerts a strong influence on the local weather of the Central Rio Grande Valley. Many polar air outbreaks from the east are steered away from the city (although they occasionally "leak" through Tijeras Canyon). Humid summer air from the Great Plains and thunderstorm-spawned tornadoes are usually kept away by the nearly mile-high mountain barrier. Summer showers frequently cluster along the mountains as moist air is carried aloft by air currents rising from sun-heated slopes, thus doubling or tripling the average annual precipitation received in the adjacent valley." *Albuquerque's Environmental Story: Toward a Sustainable Community* © Hy and Joan Rosner (1996).

C. History & Organization of Bernalillo

County Parks and Recreation

BERNALILLO COUNTY



PARKS & RECREATION

The BCPR Department originated with the purchase of Westside Community Center from the Lion's Club in 1958. The Westside Community Center operated as Bernalillo County's only facility of its kind from 1958 - 1962. The center offered classes, housed the County's first library, and hosted community gatherings and civic organization meetings. From 1962 to 1973, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) owned and operated the center. During this period, staff at the center coordinated seventeen summer playground sites throughout the County.

In 1973, the County Commission funded a separate Parks and Recreation Department. The goals of the BCPR Department were to address the increased demand for leisure and recreational services and to improve the quality of recreational services to County residents living outside the City of Albuquerque municipal limits.

Since 1973, BCPR Department has grown to include dozens of diverse facilities and services. The Department now manages:

- ◆ Seven multi-purpose community centers that are adjacent to other park facilities that create multi-functional community complexes,
- ◆ Four swimming pools,
- ◆ Nearly forty community and neighborhood parks,
- ◆ Sixty-six athletic fields and numerous tennis and basketball courts,
- ◆ Seven specialty facilities emphasizing equestrian, hang gliding, polo, BMX, or performing arts,
- ◆ 1,000 acres of public Open Space,
- ◆ Programs and special events benefiting youth, teens, seniors and the community at large.

The Department is divided into five sections, with each having diverse programs and facilities:

1. Special Programs

The award-winning Dance, Dance, Dance “It’s A Teen Thing” program and special events, Anti-Graffiti Program, Bernalillo County Family Literacy Program, four Community Pride Events (one in each Commission District except District 3), and the Bernalillo County/Intel Computer Clubhouse.

2. Community Fitness

- A. Sports: Adult basketball, youth basketball, adult softball, co-ed adult sand volleyball, wrestling programs and tournaments.
- B. Aquatics: Recreational swimming, swimming lessons, lap swimming, swim team, water aerobics and water safety instruction certification.
- C. Fitness Centers: Atrium Fitness Center, Rio Grande Fitness Center, Westside Fitness Center and Los Padillas Fitness Center.

3. Community Centers

Preschool recreation (Parky’s Pals), before and after school and intersession recreation, summer recreation for youth, adult enrichment, arts and crafts, adult literacy, General Equivalency Diploma (GED), fitness, programs for adults and seniors, martial arts, recreational sports, senior meal sites, music and dance, and community meeting space.

4. Youth and Senior Services

Senior programs, meal sites at seven locations, special events and field trips, summer youth recreation, summer lunch program, before and after school programs and the Middle School Initiative.

MISSION STATEMENT:

As a service of the Board of County Commissioners, Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation is responsible for creating and providing Recreation, Leisure and Community Services necessary to promote public well being and quality of life for youth, adults, senior citizens and special populations of Bernalillo County.

In recognition of our responsibility to the citizens of Bernalillo County, the employees of the Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation Department pledge the following:

To courteously and equitably administer all programs and provide safe, quality facilities and services.

To foster open communication with government public and private sector, civic and service organizations, to identify, meet, and serve the recreational and leisure needs of the citizens of Bernalillo County.

To maintain a professional administration through the application of sound management practices.

5. Land Management

Park, Open Space and playground maintenance, trail and median landscaping maintenance, special event preparations, planning and construction project management.

D. Purposes of the Master Plan Update

Completion of capital projects identified in the 1995 plan and partial funding for new projects are the two primary reasons for updating the Master Plan. Plan priorities shift as funding is (or is not) available and serve as a reminder that master plans are general guides, not concrete dictums, that need to be revisited periodically.

Typically, BCPR receives State Grant and County General Obligation Bond funding for projects that require several development phases to complete. It is rare when complete project funding comes at once. Without master planning as an instituted strategy and without site-specific master plans, park and community center development is “piece-mealed”. This reality can have the unintended affect of poor site circulation/design, increased maintenance costs, and sacrificing one area of a facility in favor of a newer improvement. This P.O.S.T. Master Plan is a necessary precursor to efficient, site specific, master plan development.

Other circumstances that call for updating the Master Plan include:

- ◆ Balancing acceptable levels of service with water availability (or unavailability) in the unincorporated areas, high costs of land acquisition, and whether or not future budgets will increase for operation and maintenance of facilities;
- ◆ Maintaining public involvement in project development and addressing public expectations;
- ◆ Prioritizing projects for State Grants and/or General Obligation Bond capital funding.

- ◆ Revisiting goals and objectives for the entire P.O.S.T. system;
- ◆ Integrating of parks, Open Space, and trails – the P.O.S.T. network;
- ◆ Exploring potential partnerships and facility co-location opportunities;
- ◆ Expanding trail network and other facilities;
- ◆ Adding Open Space acreage and program and management responsibilities;
- ◆ Developing internal capacities within the Parks and Recreation Department;
- ◆ Reflect collected and assessed impact fee changes through ordinance amendments in summer 2002; and,
- ◆ Integrating City-County government unification discussions.

As a member of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), BCPR must be aware of national trends affecting the Department and its ability to serve the public. These trends are another important reason to update the Master Plan.

Open Space:

publicly owned undeveloped land set aside for conservation and/or recreation. These lands are managed to retain their natural character to benefit people by conserving resources related to the natural environment, while providing opportunities for outdoor education and recreation.

vs.

open space:

privately owned undeveloped lands, usually associated with a subdivision, intended for use and enjoyment by the owner(s) for the purposes of agriculture, landscaping or recreation.

Table I-1 NRPA Trends & Relevance to BCPR

National Trend	Issues for Bernalillo County Parks and Recreation Department
Disappearing resources	Land and water rights acquisition, ordinance revisions
Natural areas management	Acquisition, planning & management of public Open Space property
Aging of society	Population age 62 and over increased 23% in Bernalillo County between 1990 and 2000; future increases are expected
Municipal boundaries blurred by sprawl	Discussions of City-County government unification; effect of Planned Growth Strategy

E. Projects Completed Since 1995

The 1995 Master Plan guided the successful implementation of several park, Open Space, and trail projects that include:

1. Completed Park and Community Center Projects

East Mountain Area:

- ◆ East Mountain Little League Fields
- ◆ Los Vecinos Skatepark
- ◆ Sunflower Meadow Park
- ◆ Vista Grande Community Center
- ◆ Whispering Pines Senior Meal Site
- ◆ Playground upgrades

Northeast Area:

- ◆ Altamont Little League Concession Stand
- ◆ Ben Greiner Soccer Field
- ◆ Big Sky Hang Glider Park
- ◆ Double Eagle Elementary School Game Field
- ◆ North Albuquerque Acres neighborhood park land acquisition
- ◆ Vista Sandia Equestrian Park
- ◆ Playground upgrades

Northwest Area:

- ◆ Paradise Hills Skatepark
- ◆ Paradise Hills Little League
- ◆ Playground upgrades
- ◆ Raymond G. Sanchez Community Center Gymnasium
- ◆ Raymond G. Sanchez Community Center – additional land acquisition for BMX
- ◆ Paradise Hills Community Center Annex Acquisition

South Area:

- ◆ Mesa del Sol Regional Recreation Complex, including Journal Pavilion
- ◆ South Valley Little League Concession Stand
- ◆ Rio Bravo Senior Meal Site
- ◆ Mountain View Community Center Gymnasium
- ◆ Playground upgrades
- ◆ Sand volleyball at Tom Tenorio
- ◆ Acquisition of Atrisco property for little league, park & Open Space
- ◆ Acquisition of Larrazolo property for future multi-services facility

BCPR also works with two neighborhood associations in Commission District 3 near the University of New Mexico to reforest streetscapes. These include the Silver Hill Neighborhood Reforestation Master Plan and the University Heights Neighborhood Reforestation effort.

Some City of Albuquerque projects also receive County General Obligation Bond funding even though they are not located in the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County.

2. Completed Open Space Acquisitions & Projects

- ◆ Acquisition of nine Open Space properties on 1,000 acres
- ◆ Completion of Historic Structures Report for and initiation of Phase 1 Rehabilitation of Hubbell House
- ◆ Planning process for South Valley Open Space properties
- ◆ Planning process for East Mountain Open Space properties in conjunction with National Park Service, City of Albuquerque Open Space Division, and National Forest Service

3. Completed Trail Projects

- ◆ Paseo del Bosque Trail south of Avenida Cesar Chavez
- ◆ South Diversion Channel Trail (aka Chris Chavez Memorial Trail)
- ◆ Paseo del Norte Trail
- ◆ Initiation of East Mountain Trail Plan
- ◆ Portion of Paradise Blvd. trail

An organizing principle of this Master Plan and the planning functions of BCPR is the concept of P.O.S.T. - **Parks, Open Space, and Trails (P.O.S.T.)**. This framework strives to link all public recreational facilities and properties to each other and to residential and commercial areas. P.O.S.T. is desirable for many reasons:

- ◆ Provide an interconnected system of parks, Open Space and trails that facilitates recreational opportunities for the community;
- ◆ Encourage bicycling and walking as transportation modes and as a means of fitness;
- ◆ Provide relief to the urban fabric of the built environment.
- ◆ Contribute to the overall public health of Bernalillo County residents by encouraging healthy behaviors.
- ◆ Holistic approach to recreational facility development.

Parks,

Open

Space and

Trails -

An interconnected system of parks, open space and trails that facilitates active and passive recreational opportunities.

Adopted plans such as the Trails and Bikeways Facility Plan (1996) and the Major Public Open Space Facility Plan (1999) contribute to the development of a P.O.S.T. system in the greater Albuquerque area. These plans are elaborated upon in Chapter II. This P.O.S.T. Master Plan will build upon the work already completed by recommending facility improvements in the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County.

F. Elements of 2003 Master Plan

This introductory chapter establishes the contexts of local government, natural setting of Bernalillo County, department origins, and department accomplishments. Chapter II outlines the existing conditions of relevant plans and policies that affect the capital programming and planning undertaken by BCPR, including a section devoted to water. A brief demographic summary of future population projections in Bernalillo County concludes Chapter II.

Chapter III presents the existing conditions of parks, Open Space properties, and trail facilities. Summaries of facilities and features, profiles of each park service area, the origins and status of the Open Space program, and an overview of trails are presented.

Chapter IV describes the two rounds of public participation used to gather initial input for this plan and to present draft conclusions and future projects. The same process to engage the public in 1993-94 for the 1995 plan was used for this 2003 update, which allows for longitudinal comparisons and a useful baseline for gauging past responsiveness and success.

Chapter V contains the “plan” itself, also known as the proposed work program for Bernalillo County Parks & Recreation to undertake between 2003 - 2010. Its contents and conclusions come from the previous four chapters, which have established the necessary context, background, and direction to understand future efforts and capital needs. Project

are prioritized as relative **HIGH, MEDIUM, OR LOW** that are determined by available funds, land and water resource availability, staff, level of service improvement, and other intangibles. This chapter is intended to guide capital spending and project priorities through 2010 for the state legislators in the unincorporated areas of Bernalillo County, County Commission, County Management, Parks and Recreation Department, and the public.



"Parky" – BCPR Mascot

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